



Harlington and Sundon Lower Schools
'A place to belong, grow and succeed'

A Parent/Carers' Guide to Working Memory



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This guide is designed to help you support your child, whether they have a formal diagnosis or you simply notice they struggle to hold and use information. At Harlington and Sundon Lower Schools, we believe that parents and school are on the same team, working together to ensure every child feels successful.

What are working memory difficulties?

Working memory is like a 'mental workspace.' It is the ability to hold onto information in your mind while performing a task. Think of it as a post-it note that quickly loses its stickiness; if a child's working memory is overloaded, information simply drops away. Common signs include:

- **Following Instructions:** Finding it hard to follow a sequence of directions (e.g., 'Get your shoes, find your bag, and wait by the door').
- **Task Completion:** Starting a task but forgetting what they were supposed to do halfway through.
- **Losing Track:** Forgetting where they are in a story or losing their place in a math problem.
- **Processing Speed:** Taking longer to respond because they are struggling to hold the question and the answer at the same time.
- **Organisation:** Appearing 'dreamy' or distracted because they have lost the thread of what is happening.

What does the school do that supports children with working memory difficulties?

We use several strategies to reduce cognitive overload and support children's mental workspaces:

- **Memory Prompts:** We provide visual aids, word banks, working walls and checklists so children don't have to rely solely on their memory.
- **Visual Timetables:** These provide a permanent reminder of the day's structure.

- **Chunking Information:** We break instructions down into small, manageable steps rather than giving a long list.
- **Checking for Understanding:** We ask children to repeat instructions back to us to ensure the 'post-it note' has captured the information.
- **Quiet Workstations:** Reducing background noise and visual clutter helps the brain focus on the task at hand.

What else can the school do?

If your child requires more tailored support, we can offer further specialised interventions:

- **Personalised 'Now/Next' Boards:** To focus on just two stages of a task at a time.
- **Visual Checklists:** Individualised lists for packing bags or completing specific classroom routines.
- **Repetition & Rehearsal:** Giving children extra time and opportunities to practise a skill until it becomes automatic.

What can I do at home?

- **The 'One at a Time' Rule:** Give one instruction at a time. Wait for them to finish before giving the next one.
- **Use Visual Aids:** Use pictures or written lists for morning and bedtime routines to take the pressure off their memory.
- **Encourage Visualisation:** Ask your child to 'make a picture in their head' of what they need to do.
- **Externalise Memory:** Use calendars, post-it notes, Alexa alarms or phone alarms for important tasks or events.
- **Reduce Distractions:** Ensure a clear, uncluttered space for homework to help them stay focused on the information they need.





What might the next steps be?

- If concerns persist despite the strategies put in place, please arrange a meeting with your child's class teacher. They may then refer the child to the school's SENDCo (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Coordinator).
- Working memory is often an indicator of other needs. We may discuss a referral to an Educational Psychologist (EP) for a more in-depth assessment of their learning profile.

Where else I can get support?

- **British Dyslexia Association:** Offers great advice on working memory as it often overlaps with literacy (<https://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/>).
- **Understood.org:** Excellent resources for understanding executive function and memory (www.understood.org).

We are on your team! We understand that it can be exhausting to repeat instructions constantly. We are here to help build your child's confidence and find strategies that work for them. Please know that we are here to support you just as much as we are here to support your child. Our shared goal is to see your child thrive.